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Army leadership implements changes in approach to counseling

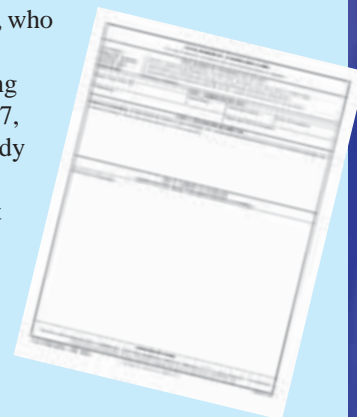
“We need to change the Army culture and make counseling into a positive experience, a subordinate-centered process with two-way communication.”

— Master Sgt. Clifford A. Roddy

By Staff Sgt. Dave Enders and
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The word around the Army is that NCOs aren't properly developing soldiers through counseling, and the Army's senior leadership is listening. As a result, the Army is implementing changes in the approach and consistency of developmental counseling throughout the Army.

“In the past, soldiers have negatively viewed counseling,” said Master Sgt. Clifford A. Roddy, who is working on fielding guidance on counseling (contained in FM 7-27.7, *The NCO Guide*). Roddy is at the Center for Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, Kan. “We need to change the Army culture and make counseling into a positive



experience, a subordinate-centered process with two-way communication.”

The need for change arose from the Army Training and Leader Development Panel study on NCOs released in 2002. More than 30,000 active and reserve component officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, enlisted soldiers and spouses provided input to the study through surveys, participation in focus groups or personal interviews. The study focused on training and leader development requirements for NCOs.

“People are the engines of our capabilities and are the most important elements of Army Transformation,” said Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army. “We need the input of key constituent groups to help chart the proper path to transforming this Army and ATLDP gives us that input.”

Since people will make the difference in tomorrow’s Army, the Army’s leadership looked for better ways to develop today’s soldiers into tomorrow’s leaders. Those will be leaders who are accus-

tomed to processing information on their own.

“Our old counseling method dwells on the past,” Roddy said. “What we’re working on is providing a clear understanding of our current doctrine. In developmental counseling, an NCO will work to take negative events and turn them into developmental opportunities.”

The key to effective developmental counseling will be greater soldier involvement in the counseling session. The subordinate will work with the supervisor to establish a plan of action for the soldier’s development. Subordinates will offer their ideas on how they can maintain their strengths and improve their weaknesses and help the soldier set achievable goals. Supervisors will set the plan of action on paper using the DA Form 4856, *Developmental Counseling* form. It is the leader’s responsibility to make sure the subordinate has a clear plan and the resources to achieve the objectives. Monthly assessments of the soldier’s progress toward objectives established in

the plan of action will keep the supervisor and subordinate on track.

“The plan of action has to be specific enough and laid out in a timeline fashion based on the crawl-walk-run philosophy,” Roddy said, meaning the plan must have one step building on another so the soldier can reach the goals the supervisor and subordinate have worked out.

The new doctrine is spelled out in a 1999 revision to FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*, Appendix C, Counseling. Roddy is part of a team working to revise NCO Education System blocks of instruction on counseling to include a more hands-on approach that shows students how to counsel (practical exercises) rather than only telling them about counseling (theory). He also works with a hand-picked team of recent Sergeants Major Course graduates based at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. The team travels around the world to help fill a gap between the time it takes to get every NCO in the Army back into an NCOES course to receive this revised training. Planners project it will take up to five years for every NCO in the NCO Corps to go back to an NCOES school and receive the new training. So to jump start the process of educating NCOs, the team offers train-the-trainer workshops on effective developmental counseling.

Sgt. Maj. Joseph J. Paul, a member of the traveling team, said the workshops the teams provide reinforce the concept of developmental counseling. They also show NCOs how to use the quarterly counseling with the monthly assessment approach mentioned in FM 7-22.7. The NCOs return to their units to provide the same training within their units.

“We’ve offered the workshop throughout the Army and around the world,” Paul said. “Feedback has been excellent, and many of those who attend are glad to see the new approach.”

In the workshops, the team members not only explain the process of conducting developmental counseling, they act out scenarios based on situations NCOs encounter daily throughout the Army. Before the one-day workshop ends, each participant has the opportunity to work through counseling scenarios and complete a DA 4856 counseling form. Also, the counseling training team gathers feedback from NCOs about counseling in the field, as well as the



Photo illustration courtesy U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy

effectiveness of their training. This feedback has already helped to shape the course material being developed for NCOES courses.

So far, the team has visited 13 sites and trained more than 1,300 NCOs and a dozen civilian supervisors. They have also briefed 1,100 senior leaders on developmental counseling and the efforts to reintroduce the doctrine to the field. And the work continues.

"[Feedback from] our trips to the field reinforced the feeling out in the field [reported in the ATLDP (NCO) study] that NCOES

is not giving NCOs a hands-on approach to learning how to conduct developmental counseling," Roddy said. "Not only are we getting the word out to the field on how to conduct counseling, we're getting ideas on how to adjust the training NCOs will receive at NCOES courses. These ideas will greatly assist in fulfilling recommendations we received from the ATLDP (NCO) study concerning NCOES."

To request a team visit, unit representatives can e-mail the Web site manager of the Army's Developmental Counseling Web site at www.counseling.army.mil.

Counseling Web site offers tools

Let's face it, counseling is never easy. Often, when it comes down to it, there's no one around to help the NCO figure it all out.

But when it comes to understanding developmental counseling and learning how to put it into practice, NCOs have a source of information just a few mouse clicks away.

The Center for Army Leadership maintains a counseling Web site full of helpful hints, suggested counseling topics and answers to commonly asked questions. The address, www.counseling.army.mil, is easy to remember, too.

A good place to begin an education there is by clicking on the "Frequently Asked Questions" link on the left-hand side of the homepage. One of nine links, the FAQs show the NCO that many others have written in asking questions about getting a handle on how to perform developmental counseling. The FAQs provide information to debunk some of the common myths floating around about developmental counseling (like when am I supposed to find the time to sit down with my soldier?). And it offers useful suggestions on how to begin to understand counseling doctrine.

Next, visitors to the site might want to give the "Teaching Counseling" link a try to access a full PowerPoint presentation for teaching others how to conduct developmental counseling. Not only is the briefing useful to someone dedicated to learning more about counseling doctrine, it can be downloaded and used to teach counseling classes to other NCOs at the unit level.

Even someone who understands the developmental counseling process will still find helpful tools at the site.

They'll also find an opportunity to help improve the counseling skills of other NCOs by providing suggested counseling topics for soldiers by rank and military occupational specialty.

The home page's most visual feature is the array of military ranks that appear on the screen. By clicking on a rank, a visitor will be greeted by a list of career management fields. For example, by clicking on the sergeant's stripes and then the link to CMF 25, Visual Information, the visitor will find a page with two drop-down menus to choose from. Clicking on the Performance/Professional Growth counseling samples and selecting Multimedia Illustrator brings up a list of topics to discuss during counseling: possible short- and long-term goals, possible plans of action and leadership responsibilities written by Sgt. Maj. John L. Murray, a senior leader in the CMF.

"The suggested topics lists are still under construction, but we can continue to improve the Web site if soldiers out in the field would send us their suggested topics lists," said Master Sgt. Clifford Roddy at the Center for Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Roddy is working on fielding guidance on counseling (contained in FM 7.27-7, *The NCO Guide*). He said his office sends the suggestions that come in to the site (there's a link to submit on the home page) on to the CMF proponent agency for review. Once

scrubbed, Roddy's office posts the list to the site.

Other features at the site include direct links to two appendices from FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*. Appendix B contains information on performance indicators and Appendix C on developmental counseling. The site also hosts electronic counseling forms for download and helpful hints for developing a unit-level counseling program.

